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ABSTRACT

In recent years, haiku has become a widely adopted part of the language arts, social studies, and multicultural studies curriculum, particularly at the elementary level. Haiku became popular in the 17th and 18th centuries in Japan. Haiku remains popular because these poems describe nature and human experiences, as well as being simple and short. Through inquiry, examples, and audio-visual materials, students will discover the essence of haiku and eventually apply what they learn in this unit in a final activity by writing their own haiku. This unit consists of an opening activity, plus three main activities and optional closing activities. Activities are entitled: (1) "Reading Haiku"; (2) "Characteristics of Haiku"; (3) "Visualizing Haiku"; and (4) "Writing Haiku." Three appendices conclude the unit: (1) "Teacher Introduction to Haiku Poetry"; (2) "Poems to Accompany Slides"; and (3) "Haiku Reading List." (EH)

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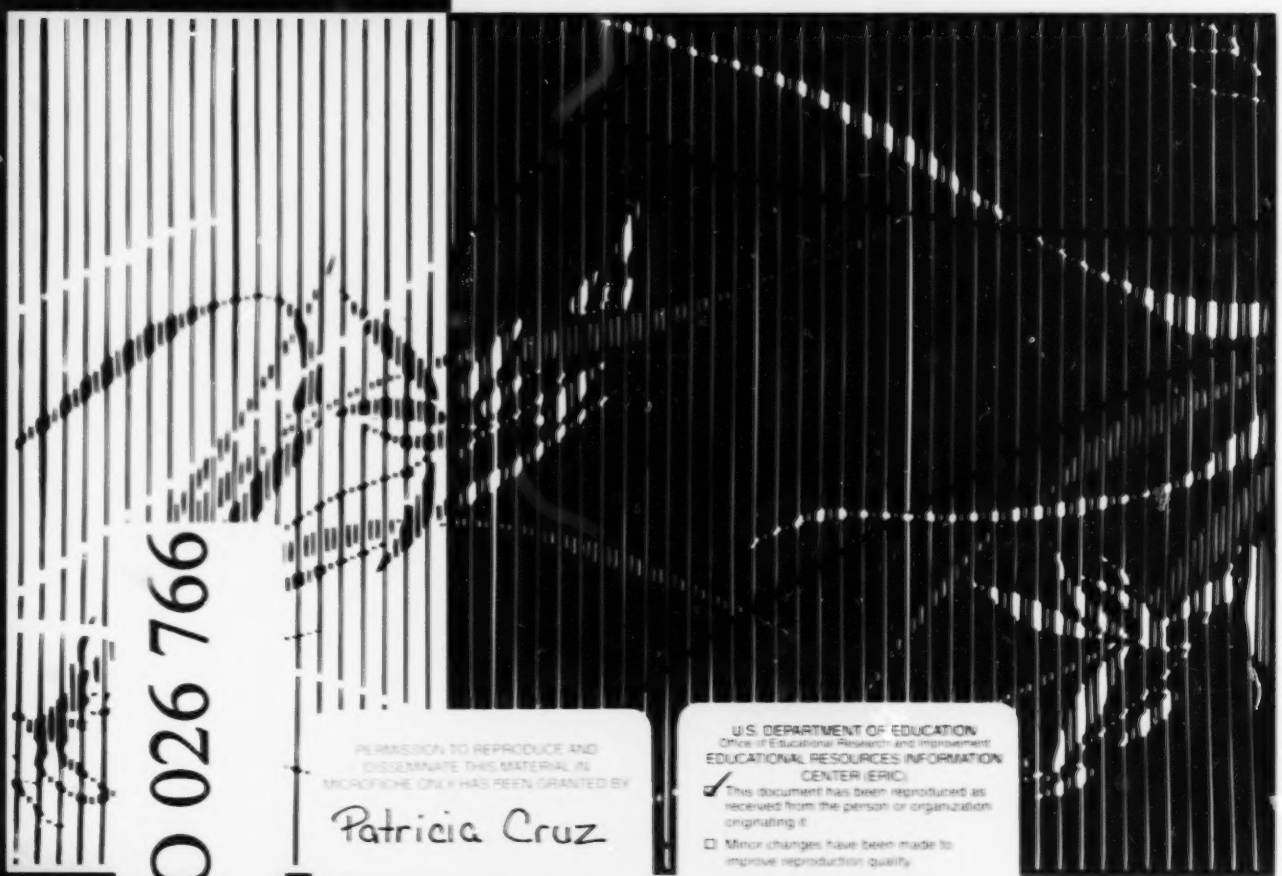
ELEMENTARY

# THE HAIKU MOMENT: SEEING THE WORLD IN A GRAIN OF SAND



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# THE HAIKU MOMENT:

# SEEING THE WORLD IN A GRAIN OF SAND

A Curriculum Unit for
Elementary levels

Developed by

The Japan Project

Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE)

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## unit introduction

Introduction ..... 7
Unit Goals ..... 7
Materials ..... 7
Grade Level ..... 7
Subjects ..... 7
Icons ..... 8
Teacher Preparation ..... 8

## opening activity

Reading Haiku ..... 9

## activity one

Characteristics of Haiku ..... 11
Transparency 1A ..... 13

## activity two

Visualizing Haiku ..... 15

## activity three

Writing Haiku ..... 19

## closing activities

Optional Activities ..... 21

## appendices

Appendix A: Teacher Introduction to Haiku Poetry ..... 25
Appendix B: Poems to Accompany Slides ..... 27
Appendix C: Haiku Reading List ..... 29

*Unit Introduction*

# THE HAIKU MOMENT: SEEING THE WORLD IN A GRAIN OF SAND

## Introduction

People of many ages and from many nations can write and understand haiku, a type of poetry which comes from Japan. Haiku became popular in the 17th and 18th centuries in Japan. Even though haiku is a very old type of poem, it is still popular among both students and adults. Many people enjoy haiku because these poems describe nature and human experiences, and perhaps people enjoy them because they are simple and short.

Through inquiry, examples, and audio-visual materials, students will discover the essence of haiku and eventually apply what they learn in this unit in a final activity, writing their own haiku. This unit consists of an opening activity, plus three main activities and optional closing activities.

## Unit Goals

- to introduce students to haiku poetry
- to encourage students to appreciate poetry, haiku especially, as an art form with specific characteristics
- to inspire students to visualize haiku, either through mental images or through illustrations
- to teach students how to write their own haiku

## Materials

- chalk and chalkboard
- writing utensils and paper
- slides (included with the unit)
- slide projector
- overhead projector
- tape recorder

## Grade Levels

This unit has been designed for elementary level students.

## Subjects

- Language Arts
- Social Studies
- Multicultural Studies

**Icons** For easier reference the following icons are used throughout the unit:

Notes to the Teacher

Transparency

Slide Presentation

Audio Cassette

**Teacher Preparation** Read Appendix A for background information about haiku.

*Opening Activity*

# READING HAIKU

**Introduction**

Setting the context for this unit, this lesson allows students to begin thinking about haiku and the images it describes. It also encourages students to relate their own experiences to experiences described in haiku.

**Objectives**

- to stimulate students' thoughts about poetry and haiku
- to show students one example of haiku
- to encourage students to think of images which could be described through haiku

**Materials**

- chalk and chalkboard

**Suggested Procedures**

1. Set the context for this unit with some introductory questions:
   - Do you like poetry?
   - How many of you have written your own poems?
   - Why do you enjoy poems?
   - Can you name any famous poets?

2. Write the following haiku poem on the chalkboard. Then recite the poem with the class.

Mountain Temple

A mountain temple;
The pagoda is buried
In cherry flowers.

—Shigeki

3. Relate this introductory poem to an experience individual students may have had, or that the class has had together, such

as a field trip to a Japanese garden, seeing pictures of a Buddhist temple, or a camping trip.

4. The following questions could be asked of students to encourage them to think about appropriate haiku images:

   - How many of you have ever been to Japan?
   - How many of you have been on a camping trip, to summer camp, or have seen something, such as a tree, squirrel, or bird you might like to write a poem about?
   - How many have studied Japanese haiku poetry before? What do you remember about it?

5. Point out to students that haiku:

   - originated in Japan
   - became popular during the 17th and 18th centuries
   - is still popular among students and adults
   - often describes nature or human experiences

*Activity One*

# CHARACTERISTICS OF HAIKU

**Introduction**

By reading four examples of haiku written by young students, students will analyze the basic characteristics of haiku and attempt to derive general guidelines for writing haiku in this activity.

**Objectives**

- to show students the basic characteristics of haiku
- to encourage students to analyze haiku on their own

**Materials**

- Transparency 1A
- overhead projector
- chalk and chalkboard

**Suggested Procedures**

1. Inform students that they are about to learn what haiku poetry is so they later can write a poem describing nature, or an object they particularly like.

2. Show students Transparency 1A. Inform students that these haiku poems were written by second graders. Ask students to think about how these poems are alike or different.

3. Read the poems aloud with students.

4. Then, ask students to count the rhythm and number of syllables for all poems on board, if necessary.

All poems except the last one have 17 syllables in the traditional 5-7-5 haiku pattern.

5. If students have trouble counting syllables, it may be helpful to recite a poem with which they are familiar.

6. Try to encourage students to derive guidelines for writing haiku by asking questions such as the ones on the following page. Record student responses on the board. These responses will help students later when they write their own haiku.

- How are these poems similar? Different?
- Are they the same length? Do they have the same number of lines? How many syllables are there in each line? In the entire poem?
- Do haiku rhyme?
- What subjects do the writers write about? Do they write complete sentences or thoughts?
- Can you close your eyes and picture a haiku subject in your mind? For example, can you see a frog jumping into a pond or a bird hopping around on a snow-covered pine branch? (Have students close their eyes and try this exercise.)

7. Derive the following key ideas or principles from this discussion:

- Haiku have three lines, 17 syllables arranged in 5-7-5 pattern, although there are exceptions both in English and Japanese—for example, the last student haiku has a 5-6-5 pattern.
- They have few words; they do not express everything the writer sees or feels.
- Haiku are full of strong images; the view of nature is simple and clear.
- Each poem has one main subject, something the writer has felt or experienced with his/her senses; for example, the salty sea, a smooth wild mushroom, the smell of a cedar log or sharp pine needles.
- Haiku do not rhyme in Japanese, although some do in English.
- They do not have to be full sentences; images are more important.

# SAMPLE HAIKU

| | |
|---|---|
| *Haiku*<br><br>Birds are flying kites,<br>Swaying again and again<br>Through the gentle wind. | *Butterflies*<br><br>Butterflies are like<br>A many-colored rainbow<br>Nectar is their gold. |
| *Spring Flowers*<br><br>Spring flowers in bloom,<br>Filling the world with fragrance<br>People smelling them. | *Japanese Garden*<br><br>Waterfalls and ponds,<br>Red maple trees on hills;<br>Japanese garden. |

*Activity Two*

# VISUALIZING HAIKU

**Introduction**

This lesson uses the six slides, included in the unit, that are to be shown along with the accompanying tape of Japanese music and haiku. The haiku on the tape is recited both in English and in Japanese so that students may feel the rhythm in both languages. The haiku more or less convey verbally what the slides show us visually.

For example, the first slide is of two camellia blossoms and is accompanied by the following translation of its Japanese equivalent:

| *The Camellias* | Japanese Original |
|---|---|
| As it fell, | Ochizama ni |
| Water poured out, | Mizu koboshi keri |
| The camellia bell. | Hana tsubaki. |

Although the 5-7-5 haiku rhythm is not preserved in the English translation, the original does follow the haiku pattern. This often happens when translating a poem into English.

**Objectives**

- to show students visual illustrations of haiku images
- to encourage students to make their own ideas about images that they could write about
- to show students that since the main idea of haiku is describing an image which is not necessarily Japanese

**Materials**

- paper and writing utensils
- slide projector
- tape recorder
- slides
- cassette tape

**Suggested Procedures**

1. Tell students that they are about to view six slides. Each slide will be shown twice: the first time, very quickly, and the second time for a moment longer.

2. The first time around, students will listen to a haiku about each slide, first in English and then in Japanese. Tell students that the Japanese voice will let them know what Japanese poetry sounds like, even though it may be slower than usual spoken Japanese.

3. Pass out paper to all students. On this paper students should write down any ideas they have about what would make a good haiku. Students can either base their ideas on the slide show or on ideas that the slides provoke.

Emphasize that students should not try to write an entire haiku during the slide show. Instead, they should try to extract ideas from the images in the slides. Encourage students to use their imagination. Refer to Appendix B for the poems which accompany the slides.

4. Start the slide show and the cassette tape. First, go through the slides very quickly, allowing about 15 seconds per slide (the cassette tape allows at least a few seconds after the Japanese version). After the six slides have all been shown once, review them from the beginning. Continue to play the cassette tape, allowing students to listen to the koto music as they view the slides the second time.

5. The second time, review the slides more slowly, using as much time as you feel your class needs to focus on the images. Usually, 20-30 seconds should be sufficient. While showing the slides, allow enough light into the room so that students may write down ideas while you show the slides.

6. Follow the slide show with a question and answer period. Ask questions such as:

- What kinds of things did you see in the slides? What kind of flower was shown in the first slide?
- Have you ever been to places like the ones shown in the slides?
- Do you think these were taken in Japan or the United States?
- Did these slides remind you of any images or pictures that you have seen?

7. Conclude the activity with these points:

- The first slide of camellias was taken in Japan.

- The ocean slide was taken at Big Sur in California.

- The Buddhist temple in the sunset was taken in Japan.
- These slides illustrate that being close to or experiencing nature can be conducive to writing haiku.

*Activity Three*

# WRITING HAIKU

**Introduction**

This activity will allow students to create their own haiku, either individually or as a class. Students will apply the rules and characteristics of haiku that they have learned in this unit.

**Objectives**

- to give students the opportunity to use their creativity in writing a haiku on their own
- to allow students to experience first-hand the challenges and pleasures of writing poetry

**Suggested Procedures**

1. With the class, decide on a topic for your haiku. Review the rules that should be followed in writing haiku. You may wish to write these rules on the board again.
2. You may wish to first write a class haiku before asking students to write individual haiku. Or you may wish to write only a class haiku, or only individual haiku. If time is sufficient, have students illustrate their haiku.
3. Encourage students to use their imagination and past experiences in writing haiku.
4. One suggestion to expand this activity is to encourage students to experiment with the wording—changing word order or deleting words, especially personal pronouns and repetitive words. Within five minutes, each student should be able to rewrite either his/her individual haiku or the class haiku.
5. Conclude this activity by emphasizing the following points which have arisen throughout this unit:
   - Haiku uses language sparingly.
   - Haiku encourages the simple appreciation of one's environment using all five senses.

- Haiku often focuses on seasons.
- To write haiku, one must use one's imagination and memory.

# OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

**Follow-up**

If students picked up haiku very quickly or have already studied it, you may wish to introduce the concept of seasonal words, or *kigo* (pronounced key-go). Kigo are certain words which are used in haiku to trigger images of changing seasons. For example, some students may think of winter when they see an evergreen tree or autumn when they see a pumpkin. And to many Japanese people, the New Year holiday represents the start of spring. Kigo can be used in both English and Japanese to express a season in haiku.

To emphasize that students do not have to travel to Japan to imagine the images that haiku represent, encourage students to rethink the images presented in poems or other Japanese materials that students have studied, including the slides in this unit.

**Field Trip**

A field trip to a local Japanese garden or park would provide further stimulation for composing individual or group poems.

**Homework**

Have students look for a picture they think would be a fitting image for haiku. Ask students to either write about the picture on their own or have them exchange pictures the next day in class. Encourage students to challenge each other to write a haiku about their selected pictures.

**Haiku Poets**

Students might enjoy reading background information on two of the most famous haiku poets, Basho and Issa, along with an example of their poems. See Appendix C for possible references.

**Bulletin Board**

Divide the class into four seasons and make a bulletin board collection of haiku according to these seasons.

**Share Favorite Haiku**

Collect and compile student haiku compositions and distribute to parents, teachers, other classrooms, or the school library. Encourage students to contribute original poems or illustrations of favorite haiku.

# APPENDICES

# TEACHER INTRODUCTION TO HAIKU POETRY

**History**

The first 17-syllable haiku date from the early thirteenth century. However, haiku as we know them today did not become widely known until the 17th century, largely through the verse of Matsuo Basho, often considered the first haiku master. His example has inspired subsequent poets, Japanese and foreign alike, by challenging them to "get into the deepest possible contact with the greatest number of things" (R.H. Blyth, ed. *A History of Haiku*). Indeed, it is this ability to touch the very center of human emotions and life itself which characterizes good haiku.

**Haiku's Seasonal Focus**

One technique for "seeing the world in a grain of sand" (William Blake) is the use of *kigo* (key seasonal words), references to the time of year or seasons in which the poem was written. Early haiku poets decided that since the change of seasons is one experience common to all people, their poetry would be best understood if it incorporated seasonal movements in each poem; thus the use of kigo. Such seasonal words may either be a direct naming of the season, like "winter sky" or "summer ocean," or they may only be an allusion to a season. For example, to the Japanese, flower-viewing and the word "blossom" usually indicate spring, while to those raised in the United States, rustling leaves or pumpkins may signify autumn.

**Form**

The haiku form itself is rather paradoxical. It is at the same time simple and profound, compact yet all-encompassing, minutely rich in description, and yet high suggestive. By focusing on the "hidden glimmerings" of nature as experienced by people, it acts as a telescope for both the human heart and the natural world.

Although the most important quality of haiku is its reflection of human emotions via natural phenomena, its approximate 5-7-5 format has also become an unwritten rule among poets. Unlike a lot of other poetry, haiku does not depend on rhyme or even rhythm to give it structure; rather, the 5-7-5 arrangement lends sufficient order and "rhythm" to the poem. With only 17 syllables with which to work, the poet must choose words carefully, giving just enough but not too much detail. It is said that good haiku resemble a Japanese brush-drawing; one must fill in the missing strokes with one's own imagination.

**Simplicity and Suggestion**

Finally, when reading and writing haiku it is important to keep in mind the three stylistic principles of simplicity, suggestion, and

spontaneous interpretation of one's environment. The 5-7-5 format is merely a vehicle for expressing these qualities and by extension, the poet's inner feelings. To best understand the essence of haiku, the teacher (along with students) is encouraged to write haiku, also bearing in mind the words of Basho:

> ...all who have achieved real excellence in any art possess one thing in common; that is, a mind to obey nature, to be one with nature, throughout the four seasons of the year. Whatever such a mind sees is a flower, and whatever such a mind dreams of is the moon...
>
> —from *The Way of Silence: The Prose and Poetry of Basho* by Richard Lewis

# POEMS TO ACCOMPANY SLIDES

*The Camellias* by Basho

As it fell,
Water poured out
The camellia bell.

Ochizama ni
Mizu koboshi keri
Hana tsubaki

*The Springtime Sea* by Buson

The springtime seas
All day long, up and down,
Up and down gently.

Haru no umi
Hinemosu notari
Notari kana

*Regret at Parting* by Buson

Yesterday a flight;
Today a flight; the wild geese
Are not here tonight.

Kino ini
Kyo ini, kari no
Naki yo kana

*The Sound* by Buson

Here. . .there. . .
The sound of waterfalls is
heard
Young leaves everywhere

Ochi kochi no
Taki no oto kiku
Wakaba kana

*Creeping Shadows* by Buson

A deer along with it,
The mountain's shadow at the
temple gate;
The setting sun.

Shika nagara
Yama kage mon ni
Iri hi kana

*A Shinto Shrine* by Shiki

A shrine; here, keeping
Far from the garden lights,
Float wild bird, sleeping.

Miya shiro ya
Niwa hi ni toki
Ukenedori

# appendix b

NOTE ON MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT:
The music recorded along with the poetry itself is that of the *minyo*, Japanese folk music. The main instrument heard is the *koto*, a long, stringed instrument played on the floor with a pick and resembling a harp in sound.


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# HAIKU READING LIST

*For Teachers*

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Lewis, Richard. *The Way of Silence: The Prose and Poetry of Basho*. New York: The Dial Press, 1970.

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[1]*Hokku* developed into the *haikai* form and later the *haiku* form of Japanese poetry.